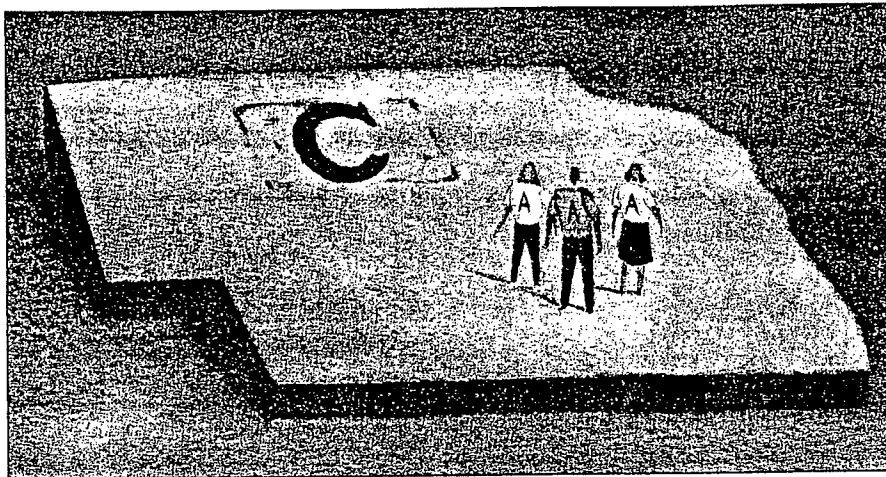


A Seat at the Table

Teachers Reclaiming Assessment Through Rethinking Accountability



Distrust of teachers is carefully nurtured by the testing industry to keep the present educational power structure intact. Under that power structure, students are shaped to the specifications of experts whom they will never meet and who may never have set foot in a classroom. That situation has got to change, Mr. Gallagher warns.

BY CHRIS GALLAGHER

THE EDUCATION report card for my home state of Nebraska in the spring of 1999 was mixed, according to *Education Week*. While children in the state ranked among the top 10 nationally in most academic categories, Nebraska nonetheless garnered only a C. Why? Largely because it does not administer statewide, standardized assessments and so is "lagging behind" in *accountability*.¹ Both those reporting this verdict and most of the state and local officials receiving it seem to be resigned to it as a sure but unsurprising sign that we have more work to do to "catch up" with the rest of the country. It

does not seem to strike most observers as odd that, although students' performance is high, the state's marks are only average. Until Nebraska develops statewide tests, it will continue to receive low grades, irrespective of what our students are doing. This kind of press may well propel the state to abandon its long-held commitment to local assessment and fall in line with the national movement toward state standardized tests.

This report and its handling demonstrate the extent to which educational tests have become "common sense." To use a term proposed by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, educational testing is "hegemonic" — that is, it manufactures consent by

presenting itself (or being represented as) "obvious."² Although standardized tests came under intense fire for a short time in the 1970s, we have returned to this practice with a fervor perhaps greater than at any other time since schools in the United States began making extensive use of standardized tests in the 1930s.³ Even many educators who have long understood the limitations and outright injustices of standardized testing and the testing industry claim that the time has passed when resistance to testing is useful. For instance, Edward White, a professor of English at California State University, claims that writing teachers must collaborate with "the assessment community" or risk losing control over programs, resources, and "national goals for writing." In the final analysis, White argues, we have only two choices with respect to tests produced by the assessment community: "we can ignore them in the vain hope that they will go away, or we can participate in them in an informed way to make them as good as possible."⁴

Surely there is something to be gained by adopting White's approach; this has been an important tactic of the "authentic assessment" movement, which has encouraged the use of alternatives to standardized tests in California, Kentucky, New York, and Vermont, among other places.⁵ To be sure, advocates of authentic assessment — who press for assessment programs that ask students to engage in and be evaluated on meaningful "real-world" activities such as writing for real readers or conducting viable scientific experiments — have helped the "assessment community" to develop kinder, gentler assessments. At the same time, I think it is dangerous to be too sanguine about the prospects for reforming the assessment community and disrupting the commonsense script for education reform, in which schools are cast as damsels

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in distress, remote experts are cast as heroic saviors, and teachers are written out of the production altogether. We need to confront the fact that, finally, the persistence of the "crisis in education" is attributable in large part to two factors: the profit margins of the testing industry that maintains the crisis and the cultural distrust of teachers that the testing industry, along with the political and education establishments, endorses.

After all, those involved in educational testing constitute more than a "community"; they form a large and growing *industry*. Granted a virtually unfettered marketplace, the testing industry has grown at a breakneck pace in recent years. Walter Haney, George Madaus, and Robert Lyons estimate that in 1993 there were seven publishers of standardized tests with annual gross revenues in excess of \$15 million.⁶ Further, they identify 30 midsize companies with total revenues from \$1 million to \$15 million and more than 500 smaller companies making less than \$1 million.⁷ The researchers note, however, that these estimates are conservative. They are also careful to point out that the "giants" of the industry take in revenues in the hundreds of millions.

And then there's the vast secondary industry of people and companies that don't publish tests but develop them, sponsor them, and support them with technology and human resources. This secondary industry includes contract companies and university research centers, which can bring in revenues in the millions. Haney and his colleagues report that the largest of the scoring firms has revenues well over \$10 million annually. All told, they estimate that the standardized testing industry did one-half to three-quarters of a billion dollars in direct sales annually in the late 1980s. But when we factor in indirect costs, including technology, human resources, and the like, the writers estimate that state and local governments invest upwards of \$20 billion annually for standardized testing programs.⁸ Surely, with public support solidly behind these "objective" measures of accountability and with massive national and state legislation encouraging their development and use, this number is much higher today.

But the testing industry has been able to secure a spot in our cultural imagination and our stock exchanges not only because of the business acumen of its lead-

ers (though that is part of it), but also because it plays to and plays up our cultural distrust of teachers. The corporate establishment, led by the political Right, works hard to create a "public" of concerned taxpayers: those who want to be sure that their "investments" in children pay off. Neoconservative columnists play to this audience constantly, stoking the fires of educational crisis and inspiring suspicions about the competence of our public school teachers. Best sellers remind us that Sputnik's shadow is remarkably long: America is once again (or is it still?) falling behind. Students are culturally illiterate and illiberally educated.⁹ Worse yet, standards have been lowered and students are denied training in the "basics."¹⁰ And through all the hand-wringing, one message emerges clearly: schools and teachers must be held accountable. This distrust is carefully nurtured to keep the present educational power structure intact: remote "experts" (the capitalists) develop educational tests and prepackaged curricula and send them off to school administrators (the managers), who then ensure that teachers (the workers) faithfully execute those plans. Students (the products) are thus shaped to the specifications of experts whom they will never meet and who may never have set foot in a classroom.

In other words, whatever the gains of movements like the one for authentic assessment, the prevailing wisdom about education reform has it that reform must be top down, not inside out. Underlying our embrace of the assessment industry and our cultural distrust of teachers is a fundamental belief that what's missing in education today is "efficiency" and that the best way to ensure efficiency is to set up a corporate structure in which teachers are held accountable to corporate CEOs.¹¹ What's good for General Motors . . .

To be fair, teachers are sometimes asked to participate in this corporatization of education; they may be asked to form "partnerships" with the assessment industry by "consulting" with test developers. But as a former member of the assessment industry, I know that when teachers are asked to participate in a standardized, statewide assessment program, their participation is often viewed by the corporate insiders as "for show" — a necessary evil suffered for the sake of public relations and political expediency. Program developers at the assessment firm for which I worked reg-

ularly spoke of "those teachers" with derision and scorn.¹²

More compelling than any anecdotal evidence I could provide about the exiling of teachers from the script of education reform, however, is the movement for *national* standards and testing. This bipartisan (read: centrist) initiative is driven by the presumption that public schools are failing and that the proper form of redress is to develop national standards for *all* American schoolchildren, irrespective of the context in which they are learning and living. Although some on the left have decried the push for national standards and testing as unfair and beside the point in an education system of such glaring inequities and although some on the right have denounced this agenda for its privileging of federal authority over local control, Democrats and Republicans have rallied behind the President on this issue.

Why? Because it is so widely accepted in the political world that the schools are in trouble and that the way to "fix" them is to make teachers answerable to mandates and authorities distant from the sites of teaching and learning. Indeed, as becomes clear in John Jennings' *Why National Standards and Tests?*, a useful (though largely uncritical) history of the debates and legislation surrounding national standards and testing, teachers have rarely been given voice in this education reform movement.¹³ Despite the rhetoric of "access" and "equity" that surrounds the movement for national standards, that movement is, as Patrick Shannon has argued, "part of a coordinated effort by corporate America to discredit public schools in order to reduce the costs of social services in the United States, and thereby significantly reduce the tax burden on business."¹⁴ And of course, holding schools accountable to national standards will require an enormous number of standardized tests — another boon for corporate America.

I worry, then, that Edward White's argument that teachers ought to "join with the ranks of the assessors," like all accommodationist arguments, naturalizes the power arrangements it seeks to critique.¹⁵ White frames his analysis in a decidedly "reasonable" tone: his pragmatic insistence that we have only two choices seems unassailable except from a hopelessly idealistic position. We don't make the rules, White counsels, and our best hope lies in influencing those who do. But if I'm right that, even

when teachers participate in the reform process on the assessors' terms, the top-down nature of that process remains impervious to change or even debate, then calls such as White's essentially ask teachers to participate in their own disenfranchisement.

This article emerges from my belief that we have choices beyond the two that White lays out for us: join the assessors or give up the game. In fact, I believe that teachers can and must *become* the assessors, the assessment "experts." One of Gramsci's greatest insights is that there are always fissures in hegemony; the potential exists for people to exploit those fissures, disrupt hegemony, create spaces to act, and exercise power. It is true, as White argues, that educators have enjoyed little success in resisting government- and corporate-sponsored assessment initiatives. However, this corporatization of educational assessment is neither natural nor inevitable; in fact, I believe that we have grossly overestimated the staying power of the assessment industry and vastly underestimated the potential power of teachers — if we can act collectively — to resist the impoverished approaches to teaching and learning propagated by the assessment industry.

These impoverished approaches are well known among educators, and I don't wish to rehearse them here. Indeed, it seems to me that teachers have already produced a multifaceted, substantive, and persuasive critique of the corporatization and standardization of educational assessment, arguing that these "reforms"

- support functionalist views of teaching and learning by reducing classroom work to practice in discrete skills and the transmission of bodies of knowledge;

- wrest control of classrooms from the hands of teachers and place it in the hands of remote experts, thus alienating teachers (and students) from their work;

- divert teachers' and students' attention away from the intrinsic rewards of education and toward extrinsic sanctions;

- focus our attention on the least important or useful information about learning ("lower-order" skills, mechanical correctness), rather than on those we consider most important ("higher-order" skills, process);

- narrow and often water down the curriculum, placing emphasis on the knowledge and skills that remote outsiders deem

most important or at least most easily measured;

- unfairly disadvantage second-language students and students from nonmajority backgrounds; and

- divert our attention from the real, structural problems of education.

As I say, all of this is widely bemoaned in the academic community; thus, instead

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of continuing in this vein, I will attempt to provide 1) a rationale for the reframing/reclaiming of public discourse on assessment and instruction by teachers, including a reworking of the concept of *accountability*; and 2) a *model* for this project. My focus here, then, is not on teachers' critiques of standardized assessment, but on how we might clear the political and rhetorical ground for teachers to get a hearing.

Rethinking Accountability

A fundamental but rarely noted irony infuses public discourse on "accountability": while teachers/schools are being held hyper-accountable, the "experts" in the assessment industry are given virtual *carte blanche*: a nearly unfettered marketplace, very few governmental restrictions, and the "right" to protect what they consider to be proprietary information. In fact, very little has changed since 1979, when Kenneth LaVelle, a state senator in New York, introduced a set of hearings on a bill to regulate the industry in that state: "The testing industry has shrouded itself in a mantle of secrecy that leaves it unaccountable to the public who should be able to

... independently assess the accuracy and validity of its product."¹⁶ This is a truly remarkable arrangement: in an age in which "accountability" is the coin of the educational realm, this crucial force in education reform is allowed to cloak itself in secrecy. It is difficult to imagine the public response to a school that tried to cut off freedom of information in this way.

The argument from the testing industry, of course, is that it must protect the "integrity," the "objectivity," and the "fairness" of its tests. But in reality, this practice shields the industry from public exposure and scrutiny. Having worked for this industry, I suspect that if information about it were more widely known, the public would be far less certain that the testing industry is an inevitable and unquestionable force in education. In fact, my sense is that if we begin to hold testing companies more accountable for *their* work, they will show themselves to be houses of cards propped up by corrupt labor practices and a bottom-line commitment to efficiency over quality or equity. I am certain that the industry could never withstand the kind of public scrutiny and vitriolic attacks that the public schools have withstood now for a century and a half.

If the assessment industry has been given a seat at the head of the table of education reform, teachers haven't been given a seat at all; they haven't been invited. Just as important as questioning the role of the assessment industry in education reform, then, is to secure for teachers a more genuine invitation to the negotiating table. The time is right, I think, for teachers K-college to speak and to work publicly and collectively against standardized assessment, against the testing industry, against the corporatization of American schooling and the deprofessionalization of teacher work, and against the American cultural desire to rank and sort students and teachers as if they were commodities.

The first step in such a project is to recognize and to help others to recognize that "evaluation is not so much a technical problem as a people problem."¹⁷ Useful, learning-focused evaluations — what Peter Johnston calls "constructive" evaluations — can be carried out only by those in direct contact with children/students every day.¹⁸ The testing industry, however, is guided by an opposing philosophy: that students can best be evaluated at a distance, from a "neutral place," and that feedback must be "holis-

tic." With Johnston, I believe that constructive assessment is possible only through collective, local effort — community-level networks of teachers, parents, concerned citizens, and students. In the next section of this article, I will lay out one model for this kind of work; in this section, I am interested in the conceptual work that must happen within communities to clear the ground for such programs.

In my view, the most effective way to begin disrupting the facile, commonsense discourse of education reform is to put pressure on the notion of "accountability." Common sense tells us that standardized tests are merely "objective" means by which teachers and schools are held accountable to the public. In reality, though, these tests represent the interests and values of the corporate elite and educational "experts" remote from the learning situations that are being scrutinized, and it is to them that teachers and school are being held accountable. A fair-minded and just concept of accountability begins with a clear sense of who is accountable to whom — and for what. I believe that schools ought to be accountable not to corporate entities, remote educational experts, or some restless national audience created by mass media, but rather to their local communities, which should engage in ongoing negotiations with schools about what it means to be an effective, responsible local citizen.

Among other things, this means that communities must also be held accountable to schools — a point we rarely hear in public discourse on education. Accountability cannot be a one-way street, and it ought not pit schools against their communities, as is so often the case. In fact, we need a clearer understanding of schools as *part of* their communities — as members of their local, regional, and state communities. Too often, the real world/school dichotomy continues to hold sway in our imaginations, allowing us to see schools as somehow outside the communities, islands unto themselves. But schools ought to be understood as community members. If this seems a strange statement, consider the much more common notion that businesses are "corporate citizens." Debates — and lawsuits — rage across the United States about the rights of corporations and their responsibilities to their host communities, but rarely do we use this language to talk about schools.

In fact, although it may *seem* natural

in a free-market economy, there is nothing natural about what we might think of as the "corporate prerogative" — the "right" of corporations to which education is "contracted out" to be relatively unaccountable to the public while schools are held hyper-accountable. At issue here is how we understand the concept and practice of community. Under the present system, neither corporations nor schools are treated as community members at all: the corporate prerogative allows corporations to opt out of the responsibilities normally incumbent upon that group, and schools are subjected to one-way accountability, which imposes on them the mandates of others (politicians and other public officials, outside experts, the assessment industry) with no recognition of their own rights or expertise. I would argue that this arrangement derives from an impoverished, laissez-faire view of community, one that relies on "a government based on rights, an economy based on accumulation, and an educational sys-

tem that reifies the notion that life is an individual enterprise."¹⁹ However, if we reimagine community, as Paul Theobald does, as "a place where people who may not like each other nevertheless work together to advance the welfare of that which they hold in common,"²⁰ we begin to understand that viable communities cannot impose on their members the kind of restraints our communities tend to place on schools.

We might think of these two views of community as the liberal, rights-based approach to social life (*gesellschaft*), and the communitarian, responsibility-based approach to social life (*gemeinschaft*). In the former, it is taken for granted that, in a free-market economy, the assessment industry has the "right" to function unencumbered. From the latter perspective, however, we would change the terms of the conversation to explore the responsibilities we all have toward one another for the common good. And the most basic responsibility



"I can't figure it out . . . we had a substitute teacher, but she looked real!"

of all members of a community, it seems to me, is to participate in decision-making activities with other members of the community through dialogue and critical exchange.

Rarely have communities recognized this responsibility for teachers; instead, teachers' responsibilities have been defined through narrow conceptions of accountability to remote experts and policy makers. In a vital community, however, teachers would have a voice and would be encouraged to engage in dialogue with other community members, including parents, other taxpayers, local businesses, politicians, community leaders, and so on. And teachers would be encouraged to speak from their expertise. In any vital community, members are responsible for practicing their expertise and valuing the expertise of other members. Most communities tend to value the expertise of the middle-class professions: medicine, the law, and so on. However, teachers are rarely deferred to in quite the way doctors or lawyers are: their work, it is thought, is public property in a way that the work of other professions is not. But again, there is nothing natural about this arrangement; it is not a "given" that the professional prerogative that allows the professions largely to self-regulate should be extended to almost all professionals except teachers.

Opponents of granting teachers a genuine sense of professionalism fear that teachers will withdraw from their communities, insulate themselves from public scrutiny. But my understanding of this responsibility suggests precisely the reverse: if teachers are recognized as the professionals they are, they will have reason to become *more* involved in their communities — as sanctioned experts. With a seat at the table of education reform, they would form productive and creative collectivities among teachers and between teachers and other community members. This arrangement would also allow teachers to assert their expertise, thereby reframing/reclaiming educational assessment. Teachers could go about building new models of assessment, not top down and merely summative, but inside out and formative. They could work collectively toward humane and locally appropriate assessment programs, and they could go about what ought to be their work in the first place: educating their students, one another, and their communities about assessment, teaching, and learning.

But what might such projects look like? How can teachers get a seat at the table? Over the past several months, I have been involved in the development of a program that poses one set of answers to these questions, and although it may not be appropriate for all locales, it is at least suggestive of the kind of work I have in mind.

The Nebraska Local Assessment Models Project

In the fall of 1998, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) announced funding opportunities from the U.S. De-

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partment of Education through the Educate America Act (Goals 2000). It called on local educational agencies and service units to submit proposals relevant to the implementation of new state standards. Specifically, the NDE encouraged proposals for 1) the development and implementation of local assessments in reading/writing and mathematics, and 2) preservice and inservice education in these areas for teachers and administrators. The NDE also emphasized its commitment to local responsibility for educational assessment, to learning-focused assessment measures, and to the use of multiple assessment processes.

In response to this request, a consortium of representatives from the Nebraska Writing Project, the School at the Center program, and nine local school districts formed to develop a proposal.²¹ The proposal describes a yearlong project aimed at the development and implementation of local assessment models in mathematics and writing. The program has four phases:

1. *Research.* At a five-day summer institute, 40 teachers and administrators representing nine Nebraska schools are guided by eight facilitators from the Nebraska Writing Project and the School at the Center in an exploration of math and reading/writing assessment appropriate to local curricula and state standards.

2. *Development.* During the following academic year, teams of teachers and administrators from each participating school develop locally appropriate assessments for mathematics and reading/writing at the grade levels of the participating teachers. Each team continues researching assessment models in the context of state standards, studies participants' classrooms, meets monthly with a facilitator, and plans implementation of the assessments and a presentation of their models at another institute the following summer.

3. *Implementation.* Toward the end of the academic year, each participating school implements, as a trial run, the assessment programs developed by its teachers and administrators.

4. *Demonstration.* At a second five-day summer institute, the original participants present their assessment models to a new cadre of 30 invited teachers, administrators, and community members from other districts.

In our proposal, we articulated three primary objectives for this project: first, the program would produce nine locally appropriate, context-sensitive assessments for mathematics and reading/writing. All districts in our state will need to demonstrate that their schools are meeting or exceeding the new state standards in the next few years; this project guides teachers and administrators in determining how best to do so.

Second, we hope to develop teacher expertise in assessment. Instead of assuming that the most reliable assessments of student learning must be conducted by outsiders, by remote "experts," we begin from the opposite premise: that those who are in contact with the children daily and who understand how local circumstances enable and constrain the possibilities for teaching and learning are in the best position to offer us reliable, useful, and learning-centered assessments of student work. By the end of the project, we will have a group of teachers who have become experts in teacher inquiry and local assessment and who can model their work for their col-

leagues around the state.

This leads to our third primary objective: to encourage teachers to *share* their expertise with one another, to create a culture among their colleagues across the state in which assessment expertise is viewed as part of the work of being a teacher. Participants in our original group of 40 teachers and administrators represent districts with close to 900 teachers and 15,000 students, and if we assume that the 30 participants we invite to the second summer institute come from another nine districts of comparable size, our total number of possible contacts for this project jumps to 1,800 teachers and 30,000 students — a significant number, to be sure, in a state with a population as low as ours.

Thus this is a model of education reform that works from the inside out, not from the top down. It derives from the belief that the primary goal of education in Nebraska is to help foster a responsible, thoughtful, and well-educated local citizenry. It does not deny that teachers and schools ought to be accountable; rather, it views teachers and schools as experts in their communities, and it allows them the opportunity to demonstrate their competency through public engagement.

What will happen in Nebraska in the next few years? We simply don't know. We are fortunate enough in our state to have a commissioner of education and a state assessment policy committed to developing a statewide system of *local* assessments. We can use our state's traditional (and conservative) commitment to local control to our advantage. If our program works, assessment will be a local responsibility and a local priority; dialogue will be fostered through collective inquiry and professional modeling. But we also know that, as a result of reports like the *Education Week* piece with which I began this article, the state is experiencing great pressure to move toward statewide standardized tests.

In a sense, then, projects like the one I have outlined here represent a test for the state — to put its money where its mouth is in terms of its commitment to local responsibility for and control over education. As we await word on the disposition of this project and similar ones around the state,²² we could encourage teachers to "join the ranks of the assessors" and develop the least inhumane standardized test they can imagine. For my part, though, I'm holding on

to my perhaps idealistic faith that teachers themselves can and will *become* the assessors. And even if Nebraska turns its back on local control and goes the way of most other states, organizations such as the Nebraska Writing Project and the School at the Center will continue to urge the teachers of this state, as they urge teachers across the country, to reclaim assessment. Finally, if — through their efforts and the collective efforts of teachers and their unions — teachers can get a seat at the table in enough communities, perhaps my faith will turn out to be not so idealistic after all.

1. The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows Nebraska fourth-graders ranking 10th nationally in math and ninth in reading, while their eighth-grade counterparts rank eighth nationally in math and ninth in science. However, *Education Week* did not consider student performance in this study; rather, it focused on standards and assessments, efforts to raise teacher quality, school climate, and resources. Nebraska's lowest grades were in standards and accountability (C-) and equity (D), a subsection of resources. But the state would have scored much lower in standards and accountability if it hadn't just adopted statewide standards. Thirty percent of that grade is determined by whether or not the state has a statewide test and which subjects are tested, and another 20% is determined by which accounting systems the state uses (report cards, ratings, rewards, assistance, sanctions). In both of these categories, Nebraska's notation is simply "none." *Education Week* is careful to note that only Nebraska and Iowa have failed to adopt a statewide test, further reporting that 36 states use school report cards, 19 use school ratings, 19 reward high-performing schools, 19 offer assistance to low-performing schools, and 16 offer sanctions to low-performing schools (closings, takeovers, "reconstitutions"). See <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc99>, from which all this information has been abstracted (1 March 1999).

2. See Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgas (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).

3. See Eva L. Baker and Regie Stites, "Trends in Testing in the USA," in Susan H. Fuhrman and Betty Malen, eds., *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing* (New York: Falmer Press, 1991), pp. 139-58.

4. Edward M. White, "Writing Assessment Beyond the Classroom: Will Writing Teachers Play a Role?," in Lynne Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, and Edward M. White, eds., *Composition in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Change* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 102-3.

5. See Diane Hart, *Authentic Assessment* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1994).

6. Walter Haney, George Madaus, and Robert Lyons, *The Fractured Marketplace for Standardized Testing* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 11.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

9. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy* (New York: Random House, 1988); Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*

(New York: Vintage, 1992); and Charles J. Sykes, *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education* (New York: Regnery Gateway, 1988).

10. Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas* (New York: Free Press, 1993); and Charles J. Sykes, *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write, or Add* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

11. This privileging of bottom-line efficiency is by no means new; in fact, it has deep historical roots in the late 19th- and early 20th-century "efficiency movement." See Raymond A. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Vintage, 1961); David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); and David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). On the recent "corporatization of education," see Michael Apple, *Official Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Henry A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Ira Shor, *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration 1969-1984* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

12. I worked for three summers as a scorer and training leader for a small but profitable and fast-growing educational assessment firm.

13. John F. Jennings, *Why National Standards and Tests?* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998).

14. Quoted in Lil Brannon, "The Problem of National Standards," *College Composition and Communication*, October 1995, p. 441.

15. White, p. 110.

16. Quoted in Haney et al., p. 10.

17. Johnston, p. 10.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 348.

19. Paul Theobald, *Teaching the Commons* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), p. 31.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

21. The Nebraska Writing Project is a site of the National Writing Project (NWP), which for 20 years has helped teachers across the U.S. to develop and document their expertise in the language arts. In this assessment project, the Nebraska Writing Project is represented by its director, Robert Brooke; its assistant director, myself; and two teacher leaders from local schools, both expert teachers and researchers. The School at the Center, another network of teachers and university faculty members in our state, shares many of the philosophical principles of the National Writing Project but is focused on rural education. The School at the Center has been nationally recognized for its contribution to rural curriculum and economic development. In this assessment project, it is represented by Jim Walter, co-director of the program; several other faculty members from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nebraska, who are also part of the School at the Center project and experts in instruction and assessment; and teacher leaders from participating School at the Center schools.

22. As this article went to press, the consortium described here learned that its grant proposal was accepted. At present, the consortium is hard at work developing locally appropriate assessments. **K**